

# Louisiana Natural Areas Registry Newsletter

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We would like to thank all of our Natural Areas Registry members for their commitment to the protection of our state's natural heritage and we are happy to help you with any issues or information that you may need. Our October newsletter includes an update on the Natural Areas Registry and 20 year anniversary for the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program.

## Louisiana Natural Areas Registry Mission

The mission of the Louisiana Natural Areas Registry Program is to work with landowners toward the conservation of ecologically sensitive lands in Louisiana.

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LNHP recently visited the 834-acre Nature Conservancy Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve in St. Tammany Parish. From left are Ines Maxit, Joshua Concienne, Patti Faulkner, Chris Reid, Judy Jones with Natural Areas, and Jill Kelly. Picture taken by Gary Lester.

### Natural Areas Registry Update

by Judy Jones, contract biologist for Natural Areas Registry  
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In 1987, the Louisiana Natural Areas Registry was established by the Legislature with the objective of honoring and recognizing landowners of outstanding natural areas for their commitment to the protection of Louisiana's natural heritage. The Registry is maintained by the Natural Heritage Program within the LA Department of Wildlife & Fisheries. We have registered 107 sites since the inception of the Natural Areas Registry Program and 67 of these are active registries today totaling 34,429 acres. The Natural Areas Registry program relies on citizen-based conservation and willingness of landowners to safeguard the best that remains of our natural world. We take our job to conserve Louisiana's natural heritage seriously, and we truly appreciate all our registry members who feel likewise.

We are acknowledging four new Natural Areas Registries in Grant Parish and they are Laird's Jordan Creek, Shirley's Jordan Creek, Beaver Creek Forested Seep, and McNeely's Hardwood Slope Forest.

Two new Natural Areas were registered in Grant Parish that are adjacent to one another and owned by a brother and sister. The first is a 15.5 acre area owned by Wayne Laird called **Laird's Jordan Creek Natural Area**. Pictured to the right are Judy Jones, Ines Maxit, and Gary Lester presenting Wayne Laird (second from the left) with a certificate of recognition. The second is a 17.07 acre area is owned by Shirley Laird Lipscomb called **Shirley's Jordan Creek Natural Area**. Both of these Natural Areas consist of an excellent small stream forest that exhibits little or no evidence of



disturbance and high species diversity. Jordan Creek is also important habitat for the federally listed as threatened species, Louisiana pearlshell mussel (*Margaritifera hembeli*), which has been located on Wayne and Shirley's Natural Areas.



### Beaver Creek Forested Seep Natural Area

is a 17-acre area owned by Stacey and Kathy Hodnett in Grant Parish. Their Natural Area consists of a forested seep surrounding Beaver Creek with little or no evidence of disturbance and contains high species diversity. Forested seeps are important natural communities because they serve as sources or sinks for nutrients and nutrient transformation, improving water quality, and offering a refuge for both wildlife and a multitude of plant species.



### McNeely's Hardwood Slope Forest Natural Area

is a 20-acre area owned by Hunter McNeely in Grant Parish. Hunter's hardwood slope forest has little or no evidence of disturbance and good structural diversity. Salem Creek and a nice forested seep also occurs in the area.

## 20 Year Anniversary for Louisiana Natural Heritage Program

The Louisiana Natural Heritage Program (LNHP) is celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Program was founded in 1984 through a partnership with the State of Louisiana and The Nature Conservancy. Today, LNHP is maintained by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and is part of the Natural Heritage Network. This network, originally developed by The Nature Conservancy and now coordinated by NatureServe, is designed to gather, organize, and distribute standardized, detailed information on the biological diversity across all 50 U.S. states, Canada, Mexico, and parts of Latin America. LNHP was founded with the goal of developing and maintaining a database on rare, threatened and endangered (r/t/e) species of plants, animals, and natural communities for Louisiana.

In the process of working toward this goal, LNHP has accumulated over 6,800 occurrences of r/t/e species, unique natural communities and other distinctive elements of natural diversity, and identified some 380 ecologically significant sites statewide. A detailed Element Occurrence Record (EOR), which includes precise locations, species population status, habitat conditions and characteristics, is entered for each species occurrence in the LNHP Biotics Database. Element occurrences are mapped in the Biotics Database and geographically displayed using Arcview, a geographic information system. Information for EOR's are gathered from LNHP staff field surveys, contract surveys, state and

federal government agencies, research studies, university contacts, herbaria, and Louisiana nature enthusiasts.

While LNHP has created an extensive database documenting Louisiana's native biological diversity, there are many natural areas in the state that have not yet been surveyed. Records for new occurrences are continuously being added to the database, and current records are updated as new information becomes available. LNHP data is applied to land use decisions, environmental impact assessment, resource management, conservation planning, endangered species review, research and education. LNHP's work has also expanded beyond inventory to include research on threatened and endangered species and involvement in diverse conservation issues concerning nongame wildlife species and plants. The job is not complete, and because habitats change, the nature of the task is dynamic.

The LNHP relies on a wide variety of sources to maintain its ongoing inventory. You may know the location of an undisturbed plant community or the habitat for an endangered rare plant or animal. If so, please contact LNHP staff so that the information can be verified and incorporated into the database. As the inventory progresses, field surveys are necessary for site evaluations. Qualified biologists, naturalists, teachers, and others are invited to participate as field surveyors. Volunteer work is a welcome and useful contribution to many aspects of the program.

### Significant Botanical Discoveries by LNHP Staff

In 1990 *Earth fruit (Geocarpon minimum)* was discovered by LNHP staff in LA for the first time. This species is federally listed as threatened. It is a tiny plant at only 1-2 cm high that flowers and fruits in the late winter through early spring.

*Earth fruit* has been recorded in MO, AR, LA, and TX. In LA we have two known populations which occur on Saline Prairies in Winn Parish. These sites are being protected by the landowner.



*American chaffseed (Schwalbea americana)* was first documented in Louisiana in 1902 "near Alexandria". It was rediscovered in LA in 1997 by a LNHP ecologist in Allen Parish. Chaffseed is federally listed as Endangered. The Allen parish site is now owned by The Nature Conservancy. The population is thriving as is the associated longleaf pine savannah community. Chaffseed ranges from Texas to Maryland mainly on the Gulf and Atlantic Coastal Plains.



*Many-flowered grass-pink (Calopogon multiflorus)* was rediscovered at Lake Ramsay Savannah WMA near Covington in 1995. It is globally rare and this population is the western most known. The only other report of this species from LA is from a 1933 specimen collected in the same general area.



## Significant Natural Sites

Many significant natural areas in Louisiana have been identified through the inventory work of LNHP. These sites are deemed conservation priorities based on the high numbers of rare species and unique communities present. Several sites are now nature preserves or under state management. **Here are a few of our many success stories...**

### **Tunica Hills Wildlife Management Area - West Feliciana Parish; LA Dept. Wildlife & Fisheries**



- ❖ Occurs on loess soil deposits (windblown silt) along Mississippi River creating narrow ridges and deep ravines
- ❖ 13 rare animal species including globally rare Webster's salamander
- ❖ 15 rare plant species with 2 known only from Tunica Hills



Webster's Salamander  
(*Plethodon sebsteri*)



Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*)



Shadow Witch Orchid  
(*Ponthieva racemosa*)

### **Copenhagen Hills Preserve- Caldwell Parish; The Nature Conservancy of LA**



Calcareous prairie with coneflowers

- ❖ Occurs on outcrop of calcareous (high pH) soils in steep hills on Ouachita River
- ❖ Calcareous prairies, Calcareous Forests, Cedar Woodlands occur here
- ❖ 27 rare plant species with 9 known in Louisiana only from Copenhagen Hills



Purple Milkweed  
(*Asclepias purpurascens*)



Hairy Jointed Meadow Parsnip  
(*Thaspium barbinode*)

### **Lake Ramsey Wildlife Management Area & Preserve - St. Tammany Parish; LA Dept. Wildlife & Fisheries & The Nature Conservancy of LA**



- ❖ Eastern Longleaf Pine Savannah (State & Globally rare habitat); also includes Bayhead Swamps & Small Stream Forests
- ❖ Occurs on flat surfaces; fairly poorly drained soil and evolved historically through regular occurrence of fire. Prescribed fires are critical to maintenance of this rare habitat.
- ❖ 20 rare plant species with 1 known in Louisiana only from Lake Ramsey



Many-flowered Grass-pink  
(*Calapogon multiflorus*)



Prescribed Fire



Eastern Harvest Mouse  
(*Reithrodontomys humilis*)



Black Snakeroot  
(*Zigadenus densus*)

## LNHP Partnerships

The LNHP works with a variety of public & private entities toward conservation of Louisiana's native biological diversity.



- Member of Natureserve, the international association of heritage programs, a network connecting science with conservation
- Provides data regarding rare, threatened, and endangered species to federal and state agencies
- Cooperates with local conservation organizations like the Cajun Prairie Habitat Preservation Society to help protect our critically imperiled LA coastal prairies



- Partners with the Nature Conservancy to help save the last great places in Louisiana
- Teams with local universities regarding research projects
- Offers educational outreach at many local festivals like Earth Day, National Hunting & Fishing Day, and the Black Bear Festival
- Provides data to seven major timber companies in LA to help with management of globally rare species
- Collaborates with private landowners in the Natural Areas Registry



## Bald eagles and brown pelicans share many things...

Both are beautiful birds, both are skilled predators, both are emblems, both were once common in Louisiana, and both were severely affected by the overuse of pesticides, like DDT and Endrin. These pesticides reached the ocean in contaminated runoff water, and were absorbed by fish, which carried the pollutants into the food chain. When these pesticide-laden fish were consumed by bald eagles and brown pelicans, they were greatly affected. Their eggs were too thin to produce healthy chicks. Twenty years later, following the U.S. government's ban on DDT, and implementation of protective wildlife laws, the bald eagle and the brown pelican have made a comeback. When people care, endangered species survive.



**BALD EAGLE**  
*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

In the early 1900s, bald eagles were common in Louisiana but because of the deleterious effects of DDT on the birds and their eggshells, only six or seven active nests remained in south Louisiana in 1972. Today, we know of almost 250 active nests occurring in the state.

Two natural areas registries have active bald eagle nest sites and these are: Bald Eagle Nest Site at Cypress Black Bayou and Detiveaux Bald Eagle Nest Site.



**STATUS:** Threatened (July 12, 1995) 1782-Emblem of the United States

**SIZE:** 32-40 inches long; wingspan 6-8 feet

**LIFESPAN:** Over 30 years in the wild

**HABITAT:** Live and nest near coastlines, rivers, lakes, wet prairies

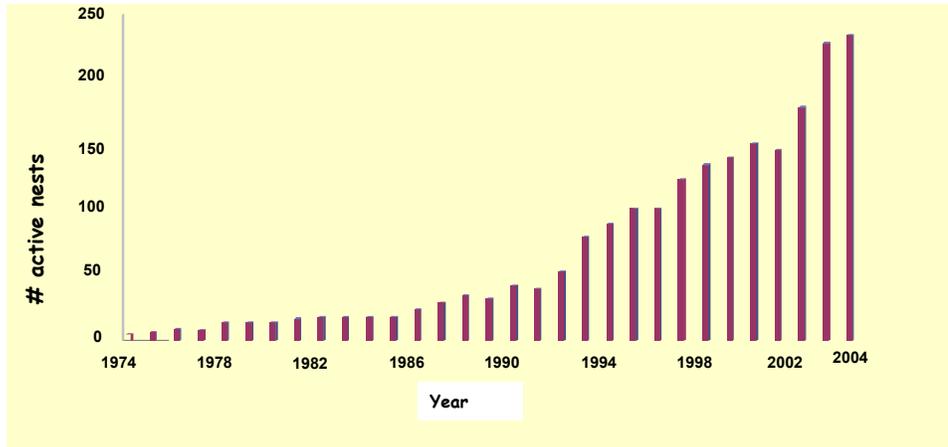
**DIET:** Fish swimming close to the water's surface, small mammals, waterfowl, wading birds

**NESTS:** Built in the limbs of tall trees and are used year after year with new additions of mosses and sticks. Nests can reach 5 feet across, 2 feet high and weigh up to 4,000 pounds.

**REPRODUCTION:** Bald eagles often mate for life. Females usually lay 2 eggs in spring. After 35 days, chicks hatch. At 15 weeks of age, the young permanently leave the nest.



### BALD EAGLE IN LOUISIANA ACTIVE NESTS 1974-2004



Two Chicks in the nest

Data provided by Tom Hess et al., LDWF

### BROWN PELICAN

*Pelecanus occidentalis*

By 1963, the Pelican State lost its pelicans, mainly from the use of pesticides, especially Endrin. These birds are back on Louisiana coasts, thanks to conservationists (LDWF & Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission) who transplanted nestlings from Florida to Louisiana between 1968 and 1980, planting the seeds for today's thriving colonies.

**Last Island is known habitat for Brown Pelicans and was once a Natural Areas Registry.**

**Last Island is now owned by LDWF and known as Terrebonne Barrier Islands Refuge.**

**STATUS:** Endangered (June 2, 1970) 1966-State Bird of Louisiana.

**SIZE:** 41 inches long; wingspan 7 feet

**LIFESPAN:** Over 30 years in the wild

**HABITAT:** Shallow waters along coast

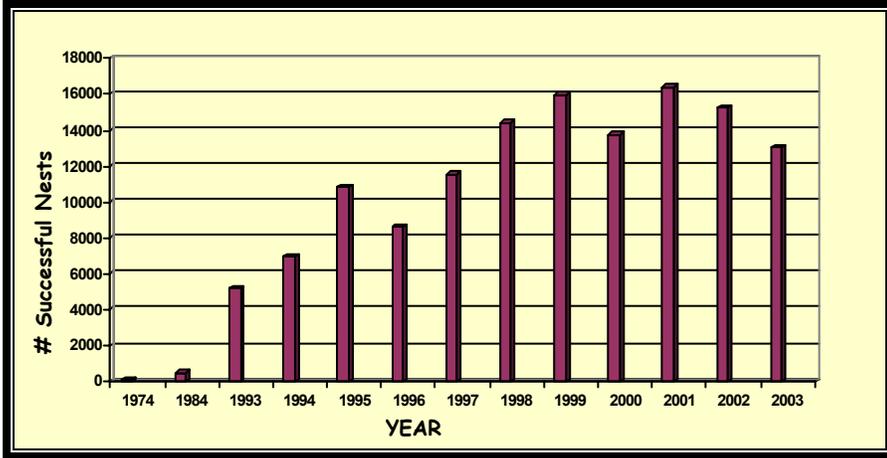
**DIET:** Almost entirely fish.

**NESTS:** They nest in colonies. Site is on ground of island, or on mangroves.

**REPRODUCTION:** Both male and female share incubation and rearing duties. Normal clutch size is three eggs. Chicks hatch after 28-30 days, fledge 2 1/2 months later.



**BROWN PELICAN IN LOUISIANA  
SUCCESSFUL NESTS 1971-2003**



Data provided by Tom Hess et al., LDWF

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